

# THE NATIONAL

SEE WHERE THE TRAIN CAN TAKE YOU

**230  
YEARS  
OF  
KING  
ARTHUR  
FLOUR**

*Patti  
Smith's*  
**ENDURING  
POWER**

**CAN  
OUTWARD  
BOUND  
HELP  
HEAL**  
*Charm  
City?*

*Sallie  
Krawcheck's*  
**MISSION TO  
CLOSE THE  
GENDER  
WEALTH GAP**

**UNCLE  
NEAREST  
REWRITES**  
*Whiskey  
History*



**SCENIC ROUTE**

*Artist Virginia Maksymowicz redesigns  
Amtrak's route map*

BY TOM SMYTH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON VARNEY



Virginia Maksymowicz's West Philadelphia studio looks like she just got back from an archaeological dig: two mummy-like body casts lie on a table, and one wall of shelves is covered with boxes labeled "Bones and Tools." In fact, the 67-year-old artist has spent decades casting plaster versions of both ancient artifacts and the human form, often achieving an uncanny resemblance to the real thing. "I mean, you can look at Michelangelo's *Pietà*—it's amazing, but it doesn't have pores in the skin," Maksymowicz says. "A mold and alginate—you're going to get pores. I find it magical to be able to do that."

Maksymowicz's work, often focused on the connection between the body and the built environment, has earned her a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts and exhibits in museums across the country. She's thrice been a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome, where she was inspired by the ever-present caryatids, sculptures of women used as pillars—a metaphor she can't believe more people don't pick up on. "I can't tell you how many people I've asked, 'Have you ever looked at the caryatids on the facade of Macy's? They're holding Macy's up. You never saw them?'"

A Brooklyn native, Maksymowicz was among the first in her family to go to college, earning her bachelor's at Brooklyn College, where a ceramics class introduced her to casting, and her master's at the University of California, San Diego, where her thesis inspired a decades-long urban legend. In a grove



**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:** 1 Maksymowicz stands alongside her casting supplies  
 2 The artist assembling three-dimensional mountains out of model railroad spikes  
 3 Maksymowicz pours an extra-hard plaster called Hydro-Stone into a silicone mold  
 4 Tools fanned out from a station highlight the busiest railroad hubs in the country

by the campus library, she installed a grid of 30 clay bricks imprinted with the profile of her own body—the very bricks where, rumor had it, Vietnam War protester George Winne set himself on fire. "I wanted people to stumble across it and make up a story as to why it's there," says Maksymowicz, who has since debunked the myth. "Oh boy, in retrospect, it was really successful."

"I'm becoming a little more metaphorical in some of my work," she continues, noting how buildings are described as

having "good bones" and pointing out castings of a ball-peen hammer beside a femur and a caliper beside a pair of ribs. It was this foray into tools that inspired her take on Amtrak's route map. "The national train system—it's part of the structure of the country, just the way a skeleton is our bodily structure," she says. She tracked down antique railroad tools at a flea market in New Jersey and cast them in plaster. "They look bone-like to emphasize that it's a skeletal system that ties together the flesh of the country."